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ABSTRACT

Modern writing textbooks tend to offer no heuristics, treat heuristics as if they do not have different impacts on inquiry, or take the view that heuristics are ideologically neutral pedagogies. Yet theory about language demonstrates that ideological neutrality is impossible. Any use of language in attempting to represent reality will inevitably privilege some aspects of reality and slight others, producing what Kenneth Burke has labeled "terministic screens." Clearly heuristics, as linguistic devices, are terministic screens, directing writers' attention, encouraging them to explore a topic through certain particular perspectives rather than others. Paradoxically, their benefit is also their hindrance: they assist inquiry by directing students along some lines of inquiry, yet they simultaneously limit inquiry by excluding other possible lines of inquiry. Once writers recognize heuristics as ideologically bound, they must acknowledge that heuristics are not as interchangeable as their representation in textbooks suggest. An analysis and illustration of the ideologies of two heuristics, tagmemics and the pentad, using Burke's method of identifying and classifying ideologies, shows that heuristics do differ in what they consider at issue, and that those differences do affect what students will conclude about a subject. Rather than teaching students just one heuristic or implying to students that heuristics are neutral pedagogies (through flippant advice like "use whatever works") instructors should begin to teach heuristics more carefully, making their differences more explicit. (PRA)

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# Ideology in Writing Instruction: Reconsidering Invention Heuristics

If you were to compare the textbooks marketed for freshman composition today with the ones marketed fifteen or twenty years ago, the greatest difference you'd see is that the current textbooks give more attention to the process of writing, rather than only the finished text. A major part of this process is invention, the generation and exploration of ideas for a text. Many textbooks now offer techniques to help students with invention, ranging from brainstorming or freewriting to more structured heuristics such as tagmemics or the pentad. Underlying all of this instruction in invention is the belief that a writer is not destined to wait on muses for inspiration; nor does she need to resolve herself to the limits of her natural talent. There are techniques she can use to prod her memory and incite the discovery of new ideas. As Ross Winterowd has said, teaching invention techniques can give students far more help than the "old by-guess-and-by-golly method" of writing ("Topics 708).

This afternoon I'd like to talk about ways that our field's understanding of invention heuristics needs to be expanded and why a more critical study of various heuristics is important. Currently, composition textbooks tend either to offer no heuristics, to explain and illustrate one thoroughly (a kind of "one-size-fits-all" approach), or to offer a wide array (an invention smorgasboard). Whether texts present one or many, they almost always minimize the

distinctions between heuristics. For example, the eighth edition of Writing with a Purpose includes a set of heuristics, directing students only to "try out" various ones, then decide which works best (37). One short text, The Elements of Invention by Jeanne Simpson, is devoted exclusively to explaining eleven heuristics. Yet even in such an anthology, there is little guidance on the advantages and disadvantages of different heuristics. Simpson repeatedly advises students to "Do Whatever Works" (2, 89) and says that they should try a variety of heuristics so they can find two or three they prefer (42). In the textbooks I am familiar with, heuristics are almost always presented this little discrimination, as if they are interchangeable and the only means of deciding between them is personal preference or, in a few texts, whether the student thinks better visually or verbally. Thus, textbooks treat heuristics as if they do not have different impacts on inquiry, as if heuristics are ideologically neutral pedagogies.

Yet theory about language tells us that ideological neutrality is impossible. Kenneth Burke explains that language is a directing of attention. Any use of language, then, in attempting to represent reality, will inevitably privilege some aspects of reality and slight others. To quote Burke, "Even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" ("Terministic" 45). To describe this linguistic phenomenon, Burke coined the phrase "terministic screen," which means that any set of terms, in directing the attention, screens reality, enabling some conceptual possibilities and

precluding others ("Terministic" 50). Clearly heuristics, as linguistic devices, are terministic screens. They direct writers' attention, encouraging them to explore a topic through certain particular perspectives rather than others. Paradoxically, their benefit is also their hinderance: they assist inquiry by directing students along some lines of inquiry, yet they simultaneously limit inquiry by excluding other possible lines of inquiry. No heuristic can direct inquiry neutrally.

Once we recognize heuristics as terministic screens--that is, as ideologically bound--we must acknowledge that heuristics are not as interchangeable as their representation in textbooks suggests. Each heuristic is markedly different. They offer different perspectives and thus screen and deflect reality differently. Their different perspectives privilege and thwart observations differently. They differ ideologically; what they define as issues differs. Above all, they have different effects on inquiry. Permit me to quote again from Kenneth Burke. In this passage, Burke explains how terministic screens affect inquiry:

> Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another. Also, many 'observations' are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made. In brief, much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms. ("Terministic" 46)

Burke's argument of causality here is crucial. The terms of an

inquiry may largely determine what subsequent observations can be made. When this causal argument is applied to heuristics, it becomes clear that the ideology of a heuristic greatly affects what is "discovered" or, to apply Burke's argument in its full force, what a student "discovers" about a subject when using a heuristic may be no more than "the spinning out" of that heuristic's ideology.

Knowing this, we must go further than just acknowledging that heuristics screen reality differently through their different perspectives and thus are more different than textbooks suggest. Given Burke's causal argument that the terms of an inquiry may greatly determine the inquiry's outcome, what is important is the precise ideological nature of various heuristics. For example, what ideological assumptions are implicit in tagmemics and, consequently, what "discoveries" is tagmemics likely to yield? How does the choice of which heuristic to use change what the student using the heuristic will discover? If the same student explored her subject with, say, the pentad rather than tagmemics, how would her conclusions differ?

Kenneth Burke has developed a method for identifying ideologies--what he calls a system's 'terms'--that can help us answer some of the questions I have just raised. In A Grammar of Motives, Burke says that an ideology can be defined with reference to five terms: scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose. These terms are familiar to us as the components of the pentad heuristic, yet Burke intended the terms to be used for the purpose of identifying ideologies. An ideology can be identified, says Burke, according to which of the five terms it emphasizes most. A stressing of scene indicates an ideology of materialism; a stressing of act corresponds

to realism; if agent is stressed, the ideology is idealism; agency is pragmatism; purpose is mysticism.

In the time I have left today, I'd like to use this classification system to work you through an analysis of the ideologies of two heuristics, tagmemics and the pentad. Tagmemics, you'll remember, directs a writer to examine a subject as a particle (as a fixed entity), as a wave (as undergoing change), and as a field (as existing within a larger context). Additionally, tagmemics asks the writer to examine the subject in each of these perspectives for its contrastive features (what makes it different from other entities), its range of variation (ways it can differ while still being identified as the same thing), and its distribution (what range of contexts can appropriately contain it).

Given Burke's definitions of epistemologies, I believe tagmemics most emphasizes scene, making it a heuristic of materialism. Materialism, according to Burke, is distinguished from other ideologies by its focus on the material, on the bodily and external. Materialism as a terministic screen privileges issues of existence, studying essences and properties; it slights questions of action and of purpose. The characteristics of materialism are easy to see in tagmemics. Each cell of the tagmemic grid is designed to explore the subject's properties and existence. The directive which begins each cell of the tagmemic heuristic--"view the unit as"--reveals tagmemics' foremost concern with a full recognition of the object. The theories Kenneth Pike used to develop the tagmemic heuristic are also indicative of a preoccupation with the material world. The linguistic concept of the tagmeme--contrast, range of variation, and

distribution--is used to fully recognize something (Edwards 11), which again suggests an emphasis on essences and properties. In addition, the terms particle, wave, and field are borrowed from physics, further marking the heuristic's emphasis on physical properties and the material world. Tagmemics, then, seeks to define a subject well. It prompts students to pursue issues of identity and slights other possible inquiry.

The pentad, on the other hand, seems to emphasize Burke's term "act". The pentad heuristic is made up of the same five terms we've been using to identify ideologies: scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose. The writer uses these terms as a heuristic by asking the questions that the terms suggest: where was the act done? what was done? who did it? how was it done? why was it done? The pentad heuristic thus leads the writer to examine her topic as a drama, centered on the act.

The philosophy that corresponds to an emphasis on act, according to Burke, is realism. In its stress on action, realism differs greatly from materialism. Rather than privileging physicality and definition, realism studies social relations. Realism sees behavior as purposeful and therefore emphasizes freedom of choice, not fate. One example Burke offers of realism is the Christian view that suffering and submissions are acts. Another example is the pathetic fallacy, which would describe wheat as tossing its head of its own free will, rather than being blown by the wind. In its emphasis on action, realism screens reality by stressing opportunity for change, but minimizing the constraints to change. The pentad heuristic screens in this same way: the writer is led to view her subject in

terms of an agent acting for a purpose. The pentadic perspective presumes choice and intentionality.

I've argued that heuristics are not ideologically neutral and are not even ideologically similar. Tagmemics leads a writer to pursue definition, analyzing something in terms of its properties and contexts to render its full recognition. The pentad leads a writer to examine something as deliberate, having been done by someone for a purpose. Furthermore, I have argued, through Burke, that the ideology of a heuristic screens what observations can be made. In other words, the "discovery" a student makes may largely be a product of which heuristic the student used. In the few minutes I have remaining, let me illustrate my argument by quickly working through two topics using both tagmemics and the pentad as heuristics. For the sake of simplicity, I'll use only the particle, wave, and field perspectives of tagmemics, not all nine cells.

The topic used in Rhetoric: Discovery and Change to illustrate tagmemics is a particular oak tree named Old Faithful. When Young, Becker, and Pike used tagmemics to explore Old Faithful, they arrived at the following observations. The particle perspective led the authors to notice the tree's size, age, unique appearance (one broken limb and numerous scars), potential use as lumber, and classification as a hardwood. The wave perspective led them to observations about the rate of the tree's leaf loss and its process of decay. Finally, the field perspective prompted the authors to analyze the tree within a context of larger ecological systems.

Now we can see how this same topic might be explored using the pentad. Our first difficulty would be in deciding which of the five

pentadic terms to identify as "tree." Usually, a tree would be considered part of scene, but if we were to place the tree in the scenic category here, we would be making it tangential to whatever act was done near the tree. The tree would not then be our subject for examination. To explore tree as a subject, we could identify it as the act in the pentad. The heuristic would then raise different sorts of questions than were considered using tagmemics. If tree is the act, who is the agent? Its divine creator? Preservationists will fought zoning regulations to ensure its existence? Or perhaps a writer would position the tree in the agent slot. What, then, does the tree do, for what purpose? If a student who used tagmemics to explore the oak tree, she would analyze the tree itself, but if she used the pentad, she would study the tree as part of a network of deliberate actions. Each heuristic encourages certain discoveries and discourages others.

Even though tagmemics and the pentad lead us to raise different questions about the oak tree, the pentad works a bit clumsily for this topic because a tree is not usually viewed as the center of a drama. The importance of ideology in heuristics can be better seen using a topic that seems equally conducive to both heuristics. The topic of homelessness will serve us well as a second illustration. Using tagmemics, the particle perspective would lead us to think about the numbers of homeless people, the demographics of that population, and what homelessness is like. The wave perspective would prompt us to consider the changes in homelessness over time: whether the numbers are increasing and decreasing and how quickly; any change in the number of homeless shelters; changes in public attention to problems

of the homeless; etc. Finally, the field perspective would lead us to study homelessness within its larger context; for example, how homelessness compares to and is different from other social problems. Using tagmemics to explore homelessness would grant us a very full description of the nature of homelessness.

Now, let's look at homelessness using the pentad. To position homelessness as an act casts it as deliberate, as something that's done, not, as tagmemics suggests, something that unquestionably is. If homelessness is the act, who is the agent? The pentad thus puts more explicit emphasis on causes. Does the blame for homelessness lie in the government, in churches and charitable organizations, in the homeless individuals themselves? The agency category also encourages cultural critique. Is the means through which homelessness is made possible the bureaucracies of federal funding, the greed of capitalism, the postmodern disintegration of family and community ties? Finally, if homelessness is an act, what possible purpose might be served by it? As absurd as this question is, it too implies that homelessness that could be changed.

I do not mean to suggest that one heuristic is better than another for exploring homelessness, or any other topic. Both tagmemics and the pentad help us understand homelessness better, and it would be equally wrong to know the characteristics of homelessness, but not its causes, as it would be to critique its causes, without understanding its characteristics. My point is that heuristics do differ in what they consider at issue, and those differences do affect what students will conclude about a subject. Rather than teaching students just one heuristic or implying to

students that heuristics are neutral pedagogies through flippant advice like "use whatever works," I hope we can begin to teach heuristics more carefully, in ways that make their differences more explicit. I hope that, as rhetoricians, we can begin to see heuristics for what they are: rhetorical acts that uniquely assist and restrict inquiry.

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